

A dark, atmospheric scene of a classroom. In the foreground, a wooden desk is visible. Behind it, rows of wooden desks are arranged facing a chalkboard. The chalkboard is dark and reflects some light. A small, framed picture hangs on the wall to the right of the chalkboard. The overall lighting is dim, creating a somber and nostalgic atmosphere.

After All These Years

he came back for her

After All These Years

*“To the girl who turn off the fan and,
unknowingly turned on the universe”*

By “Murk Lundi 38BBY”

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Dedication:

*The ink may not spell your name,
but if you read carefully,
you'll know this was always yours.*

Epigraph:

"Sometimes, people don't need to hear 'I
love you.'

They just need to know they were
remembered."

— Arthur K. A. Malowen

Table of Content

01. Introduction.....	06
02. The Beginning of a Silent War	14
03. Threads of Control.....	24
 3.1 Phase one: The Entry.....	24
 3.2 Phase two: Make it Mandatory.....	31
 3.3 Phase three: Redirection.....	33
 3.4 Phase four: Reincarnation.....	36
04. An Old Friend.....	39
05. How it all Began.....	54
06. The first Message.....	66
07. Shadows behind the Spotlight.....	80
08. Silent Threads.....	90

09. Against the Tide.....	99
10. End of the Beginning.....	114
Author's Note.....	122

01. Introduction

There are stories that burst into the world with fireworks, with grand events and sweeping gestures, the kind you hear about in songs and see in movies. And then there are quieter stories, stories that unfold in whispers, in gentle memories, in the spaces between spoken words. This is one of those stories.

It does not begin with love at first sight, or with the kind of dramatic turning point that demands the attention of a crowd. Instead, it begins the way many real stories do in a classroom, beneath a rattling fan, on a rainy morning, in a moment so seemingly small it could have been missed entirely. But that's the thing about quiet beginnings: they linger. They echo. And sometimes, they grow into something that lives far longer than anyone could have predicted.

This story belongs to a boy named **Arthur K. A. Malowen**, a boy who felt more than he ever said; a boy whose silence held storms and masked the ache of what he carried alone. He was the kind of boy who lived in layers; the world saw a bright, sharp mind, a class topper, a backbencher with unexpected wit. But beneath that, in quieter spaces only a few could reach, lived a gentleness, untouched by the cruelty he had known. A boy who once ran carefree across a schoolyard, who later taught himself to survive in silence yet never stopped believing in goodness, because once, someone had been kind to him when it mattered most.

This story also belongs to a girl named **Diana S. Mayastashki**, whose presence lingered like sunlight after rain, even when her voice had long faded from his daily life. She was one of those rare people whose kindness didn't need to be spoken aloud; it simply existed in the way she noticed

others, the way she stood up quietly for what was right, the way she made the world softer just by being in it. Exceptionally intelligent and effortlessly graceful, Diana wasn't just a topper in class; she was the kind of girl who made others feel seen, made Arthur feel like he mattered at a time when he wasn't sure he did.

And more than anything, this story belongs to the countless moments that shape memory. Moments that passed like whispers through the years, some tender, some heartbreakin, some so quiet they could only be felt, not spoken. The kind of moments that live on long after they've ended, tucked away in the folds of old notebooks, the edges of dreams, and the silence between messages that once meant everything.

This story isn't about loud confessions or grand climaxes. It's about small things; a voice lowered out of care, a message sent at the right time, a project that was never just a project. It's about

what we remember, what we carry, and what we almost say. It's about **Arthur** and **Diana**, and a connection that held strong through time, silence, and distance.

Set against the backdrop of childhood laughter, boarding loneliness, and the growing pains of becoming someone different just to survive, this is a tale of a quiet kind of endurance. A kind that doesn't seek praise but is stronger than the most will ever know. It is a record of how love or something very close to it can take root in a single act of kindness, and how that root can anchor someone through storms they never expected to weather.

It is a story about longing, and the strange ways we try to reconnect with the parts of ourselves we once lost. About memories that haunt us not because they are painful, but because they were beautiful. About how a child can fall in love without knowing what love even is, and how that feeling,

once named, can still feel just as powerful years later.

There are no knights here, no battles in the traditional sense. But there is a war of sorts: a war against time, against self-doubt, against systems and structures that try to suffocate the quiet dreamers of the world. And at the heart of it, there is a single desire to see someone again. Not to win them, not to claim them, but simply to exist in the same space. To return to something that once felt like home.

This book walks alongside its protagonist from the innocence of childhood to the calculated steps of high school strategy. It traces his growth not in height or grades, but in the way he learns to wear masks, to adapt, to protect the part of him that still remembers what it was like to feel safe beside someone. As the chapters unfold, readers will watch a plan that was born in silence take form, shift, and stumble under pressure. They will feel

the tension of trying to hold on to something precious in a world that constantly asks you to let go.

But perhaps what makes this story truly stand out isn't the goal itself, or even the journey toward it. It's the way it reminds us that every person has a hidden history; a secret world of thoughts, fears, and hopes that they carry quietly. That behind every smile, there might be a memory, behind every joke, a longing. That even those who seem the strongest might be walking through life guided by a moment no one else remembers.

The structure of the story moves with intent, but never rushes. Each chapter builds on the last, peeling back layers of what appears ordinary to reveal the extraordinary within. It is not meant to be devoured in a single sitting, but rather, to be sat with. To be returned to. Like an old diary or a childhood photograph, it asks to be felt, not just read.

And yes, there will be parts that hurt. Moments when silence speaks louder than words. Times when what could have been presses heavier on the heart than what was. But there will also be moments of warmth, glances across a room, familiar names lighting up a screen, jokes that only two people in the world will ever understand. These are the moments that remind us why we read stories in the first place: to remember that we are not alone in feeling deeply.

Though it draws heavily from school life from the rituals of societies, the politics of friendship, the drama of events that seem small to adults but mean the world to those living them its themes stretch far beyond the walls of any institution. Anyone who has ever carried a private hope, who has ever tried to rebuild a bridge long after it was burned, who has ever wondered what might happen if they just reached out, will find a part of themselves in these pages.

So, if you're ready, step into this story not as a reader, but as someone who knows what it is to carry silent dreams. Let yourself remember the friends you've lost, the roads you didn't take, the names that still tug at your heart when you least expect them to. Read with patience. With care.

Because this is not just a story. It's a window into a heart that never stopped believing that even the quietest connections are worth everything.

And perhaps, by the end, you'll believe it too.

02: The Beginning of a Silent War

Arthur wasn't like most boys his age, not because he was exceptionally gifted or outspoken but because life had shaped him in unusual ways, most of which weren't kind. He didn't have the usual stories of careless joy or bold adventure that others seemed to share. He didn't experience the same carefree high school days or friendships forged on the playground. His high school days were marked by silence, discomfort, and the weight of an invisible burden that only a few could ever see.

Moving to a school far away from his hometown came with its own weight. The new city felt colder, the walls of the boarding at the school more unfamiliar, and the boys inside less forgiving. The transition from his home to the vast, unforgiving dormitory life was stark. No one told him how hard

it would be to fit in, to be the new kid, to walk into a room where everyone already had their own connections, their own rituals. The sharp divide between the haves and the have-nots was evident, and Arthur quickly found himself on the wrong side of it.

The bullying in that dorm wasn't just verbal jabs or stolen belongings. It was the kind of quiet torment that creeps into your bones, the kind that teaches you how to survive by becoming invisible. Boys who had no power in their own lives found ways to take control by lashing out at those who seemed weaker. Arthur wasn't the type to retaliate. His silence was his shield, his dispassion his weapon. But inside, it cut deeper than any verbal insult. Day after day, his dorm mates tried to break him, to force him into a mold they could understand. They mocked his accent, his clothes, his weirdness, and anything else they could. And Arthur? He endured.

But strange as it was, those days of silent suffering forged something unshakable in Arthur. Pain became his companion, endurance his armor. He never showed weakness; not unless you were one of the rare few allowed into his inner world. He had learned that showing emotion was a luxury, something that would only give others ammunition to attack. He wasn't allowed to break, even when the weight of everything threatened to swallow him whole. Instead, he wore his mask: the foolish, sometimes joking, always distant version of himself. But behind that mask, there was only one person who truly understood him: Diana.

Back when life was simple and hearts were unscarred, Arthur had shared his childhood with her. Their friendship wasn't just ordinary; it was the kind that silently glued memories together, stitching the fabric of their lives with threads no one else could see. Every laughter in a classroom, every race across the dusty playground, every

shared secret, they all had her in them. When Arthur closed his eyes, he didn't just see the faded images of his school days. No, his memories were more vibrant because she was there. In every sun drenched morning at school, in every mischief-filled recess, in every quiet moment when words weren't needed, there was Diana, the constant in his ever-changing world.

In fact, when someone asked him about his childhood, the only vivid images that surfaced were the ones with Diana. Everything else, every moment away from her felt like waiting. Waiting for her smile. Waiting for her laughter. Waiting for her to appear around a corner, just like she always did. She was his anchor, his safe space in a world that often felt like it was constantly shifting beneath his feet. And even when life took them down different paths, when they grew older, when the world around them became more complicated

and less forgiving, she was still the one constant he could rely on.

She wasn't just his closest friend; she was his safe space, his reason to smile, only person he felt something different; something more. And though years had passed since they last met, she had never really left his thoughts. Even through the toughest nights at new school's boarding, when the world felt too heavy and he was too young to carry it all, memories of her smile gave him a reason to keep going. That memory became a lifeline, a thread he clung to as he navigated through the stormy seas of adolescence and the loneliness that came with it. It was a quiet, unspoken comfort like hearing the gentle hum of a lullaby when everything around you was chaotic.

By the time high school rolled around, Arthur had left the school's boarding life behind. The transition from his previous existence was jarring, to say the least. He wasn't the same boy who sat silently in

the corners, hiding his bruises behind books. He had learned how to wear a different face, to become someone the world could accept, someone who sees the world as the others do, someone who fit in. He'd transformed or at least, he learned how to wear a better mask. Now, he was a different kind of mystery: the funny-idiot-genius type, sitting at the back of the class with jokes that could shake the room, while still pulling off academic brilliance like it was second nature.

He had friends, enough to never seem lonely but deep down, he still felt like a lone wolf wandering without his pack. He spent his days in conversations that meant little to him, joining in on jokes that didn't make him laugh, and nodding along to things he didn't truly care about. But the moments of real connection, the moments that felt like home those were few and far between. And Diana? She was still the missing part of his soul. Even though his life had changed, even though he

was no longer the shy boy in the school boarding, something inside him still longed for her; the girl who had made the world feel brighter, simpler, safer.

Arthur didn't chase badges. He didn't seek titles or prestige. He was the kind of guy who only joined something if he saw a purpose in it. So at first, he didn't show any interest in school societies or extra badges. But that changed one afternoon, during a casual chat in the hallway. He overheard someone talking about an upcoming project; a team from school was set to visit another school for a collaborative event. Just a normal announcement for most. But for Arthur, it lit something on fire. It wasn't just any project. It was the kind of project he had imagined years ago, back when he first saw the prefects' guild in action. He had seen older boys take trips to distant schools in the name of service and leadership. And way back then before his voice had fully deepened or his heart had fully

healed, he had quietly dreamed of using such a project to return to his old school. Not to boast. Not for attention. Just to see her again.

Until that moment, it had been nothing more than a quiet dream. A whisper in the back of his mind. He had carried that thought for years like a folded note in his chest pocket untouched, but never forgotten. And now, here it was. A real chance. A rare alignment of stars. It wasn't just about the project. It wasn't just about the event or the badges. It was about getting back to a place he had left behind, to a moment in time where his heart still resided. It was about seeing her again, even if it was from a distance, even if it was just a brief moment. He didn't need anything more than that. It was the kind of small, almost selfish wish that had quietly lived in his heart for years.

But there was a problem.

He wasn't even a member of the society planning the project. And to make things worse, they had already shortlisted another school somewhere completely unrelated to his past. The window was narrow, and the odds weren't kind. Still, Arthur didn't panic. He didn't cry or complain. He planned.

First, he slipped into the society quietly. With over 50 to 100 students in it, his presence didn't raise any eyebrows. He didn't come in loud or flashy. Instead, he just... played it smart. He made himself useful without making it obvious that he was playing a game within a game. No one knew about the project he carried in his heart. No one guessed what this really meant to him. He wasn't there for the glory. He wasn't there for a title. He was there for one reason, one reason only: to get closer to the possibility of seeing her again.

Soon, an opportunity presented itself: the society was announcing interviews for top board positions. That would be his golden ticket. If he could secure

a high enough spot, he could steer the project in the direction he wanted; towards his old school, towards Diana. But there was a catch; he had barely joined the society. There wasn't time to prepare elaborate speeches or build rapport. All he had was instinct and hunger. While others might have seen this as a disadvantage, for Arthur, it was just another puzzle to solve.

He didn't try to prove his worth through dramatic gestures or grand promises. Instead, he became a necessity. Someone whose presence made things easier. He listened. He observed. And he waited for the right moments to insert himself into conversations that mattered. He didn't suggest his ideas outright. He made people arrive at them on their own.

And through it all every handshake, every conversation, and every late-night plan scribbled

on a piece of paper there was just one thought anchoring him: her. No one else knew. Not the president of the society, not the teachers, not his friends. Everyone assumed he was after a badge, a line on his college résumé, a piece of applause. They didn't see what was underneath. They didn't know that every step Arthur took was stitched together by a memory; a smile from a girl who had once meant the world to him.

He wasn't chasing a badge.

He was chasing a moment.

A moment he had waited years to live again.

03. Threads of Control

3.1 Phase One: The Entry

By mid-July, the clock had already started ticking.

Arthur stood on the edge of the school auditorium stage, watching the buzz of voices and the shuffle of footsteps echoing through the wide space. The society was holding its full-member gathering that day, and Arthur, who had only just decided to join, had walked into that world with a quiet resolution. He wasn't dressed for impact, nor did he carry a

folder of achievements like the others. But he carried something else—*intention*.

There were about fifty to seventy students from his batch already in the society, each with their own networks, their own confidence. For someone who had joined so late, the odds were stacked against him. But Arthur wasn't here to play by the odds. He was here for her. Diana.

He moved deliberately, introduced himself to the teacher-in-charge and nodded with calculated politeness to the board members. He absorbed every glance, every voice, every silence. He wasn't just attending—he was *reading the room*. While others exchanged jokes and recounted shared experiences, Arthur scanned for possibilities.

The presidency had already been settled with unanimous backing, and the vice-president and chief organizer roles were essentially claimed by popularity. The treasurer's responsibilities, though

important, demanded an attention to financial detail that never interested Arthur. But then it came to him; the secretary.

It wasn't just a title. It was structure, communication, responsibility, *visibility*. Arthur could slip into the gears of the society through documentation; the unnoticed yet vital mechanism that made everything official. The current board hadn't found someone who embodied both responsibility and skill for that role. And Arthur was a master of letters, fluent in the invisible language of systems.

That same month, the society was running a weekly outreach project for secondary grade students. Conveniently, the project team included several students from his class. Arthur offered his help casually, but with a plan in mind. Within days, he naturally transitioned into the position of acting secretary. Nobody argued. Nobody even questioned it. He was the only one who knew how

to write formal letters, organize documentation, and navigate the administrative layers with ease.

And then came the interview day.

Everyone showed up armed to the teeth—with certificates, accolades, trophies of past victories. Arthur had more than enough of those. But none of them were with him, locked away in his childhood bedroom back in his hometown. The price of boarding life. Still, he didn't flinch. Instead, he carried a single sheet—a résumé crafted with such finesse that it had been good enough for a high end institute's course application.

Good enough for that. More than good enough for them.

He went last in the interviews, deliberately. He had watched every candidate before him, observed their posture, word choices, the flicker of nervousness, the masks of confidence. He had studied human behavior for quite some time, ever

since the cold lessons of bullying taught him to survive in a world where innocence wasn't rewarded. And now, he used that knowledge like a scalpel—precise and clean.

The interview went well, but he wasn't naïve. Jumping into the society weeks before board appointments meant that no matter how smooth he played it, landing in the top three would require a miracle.

So he made one.

He let the board and the members believe he *was* the secretary. Not officially, not by title; but through action, presence, and usefulness. He continued writing all official letters. He kept a direct line with the former secretary, offering help when needed. Slowly, the old board began leaning on him. It wasn't deception. It was initiative. Nobody objected, and so it became reality.

Soon, the question wasn't *whether* he should be secretary; but *why not president?*

He could feel the shift in the air. Recognition. Respect. Relevance.

But Arthur didn't let it distract him. In truth, all of this, the meetings, the titles, the documents was a path carved from yearning. From a desire that went far beyond leadership or ambition. Because under every smile and decision, his true goal remained unchanged: To see her again.

3.2 Phase Two: Make It Mandatory

Now that Arthur had rooted himself into the society and secured the post that offered both structure and sway, it was time to escalate the plan. Phase two was about turning an optional project into an *unavoidable* one.

He understood the pulse of the society. In a boys' school, the very idea of organizing an event in a girls' school was enough to generate unanimous enthusiasm. So Arthur proposed it—softly, not as a main point, but as a floating idea in a casual meeting: "What if we took this project to a girls' school? It could be more impactful, plus the experience would be broader."

The bait was too tempting to resist.

Within weeks, that minor suggestion had grown into one of the society's flagship projects. The paperwork, permissions, and planning became top priorities, and Arthur made sure he handled most of it personally. That way, he could steer the ship from the shadows.

Then, the next shift: *change the target school*.

He began subtly planting doubts about the logistical challenges of the originally chosen school. Nothing overt; just thoughtful concerns about distance, approvals, communication barriers. Then he suggested a “smarter” idea—maybe doing the project in someone’s *previous school* would make everything smoother. Familiarity. Easier connections. A good story.

The idea took root like wildfire. Suddenly, everyone in the board was excited about the prospect. The

narrative had changed, and Arthur never had to push; it was enough to *nudge*.

3.3 Phase Three: Redirection

Now came the trickiest part. The final redirection had to be precise.

Arthur couldn't be the one to propose his past school directly; not if he wanted the idea to pass without suspicion. So he engineered a scenario where the president himself would suggest it.

In a meeting between the president, treasurer, and Arthur, the moment came. They were debating between two potential schools for the event. Casually, with a half-smile, Arthur said, "Why don't we just do it in your old school? Imagine the president walking back to where it all began." It

was said in jest, light enough to float but sharp enough to stick.

And just as he anticipated, the president volleyed the joke back: “Why not your school then?”

Arthur gave a modest shrug. “I mean, we could keep that in mind if nothing else works out.”

That was all it took. The seed was planted by another’s voice.

Now the project had narrowed down to two schools; his and the originally planned one. All that remained was to remove the obstacle.

Since Arthur handled all communications with school officials, it was easy to “fail” at contacting the other school’s principal. After a week of mock effort, he informed the president they hadn’t been able to reach the required authorities. The president, now fully invested, turned to Arthur and

said: “What about your school then? Can we make that happen?”

And Arthur, calm and ready, replied: “I can talk to the principal. I think it’ll work out.”

Nobody saw the strings. Just the motion.

But behind the calm exterior was a quiet urgency. He carried this entire structure on his own shoulders. Not out of ego, but necessity. Because this might be the *only* chance to see her again. And he couldn’t trust anyone else with that hope.

3.4 Phase Four: Reincarnation

All that remained was one call.

The final phase was personal. Raw. Vulnerable.

Arthur didn't have Diana's number. He hadn't contacted her for years—not because he didn't want to, but because he never had a reason that made sense. No excuse that didn't feel like an intrusion.

But now, he had one.

So he tried. He reached out to a mutual friend, hoping he still had Diana's contact.

He didn't.

Arthur heard the words early in the morning, and the day collapsed before it began. His insides churned with regret. *Why didn't I try earlier? Why did I wait so long?*

The weight of his loneliness returned in full. He had crafted a plan so carefully, executed every step with control. But emotions didn't obey logic. That day, he let himself break a little.

Still, duty called.

No matter how personal his motives, he had responsibilities now. The society depended on him, and he wouldn't let them down.

So he called an old teacher, under the guise of requesting the principal's number. Midway through

the conversation, driven by a last spark of hope, he asked: “By any chance, would you have a contact number for someone from our batch?”

The teacher paused, then answered, “Yes, I do.”

Just like that, Arthur had a thread. A number. A path.

A few days later, he spoke with the principal. The man’s voice carried warmth and pride. He loved the idea of the project and invited Arthur to visit in January to finalize everything.

Two chances now.

Two possible meetings. Two paths converging.

And in between them, the most important call of all; the one to his old friend. The one who might just lead him to her.

What happened next, neither spreadsheets nor strategies could have prepared him for.

04. An Old Friend

By now, Arthur had managed to do something he hadn't dared in years, he reached across the chasm of time and silence and contacted one of his childhood friends. Not through some grand gesture, but with a single, humble message. Just one word: *Hi!*

Three letters.

So small, so soft, yet so heavy.

Because behind that one syllable lay nine long years of distance, of absence, of wondering and forgetting and hoping not to be forgotten.

He stared at the screen longer than most would. Each second felt like its own kind of eternity, a silent echo bouncing off the walls of the past and returning to him as fear. Would this friend remember him? Would they laugh at his message?

He nearly convinced himself not to send it. But his thumb had moved too quickly. It was done. Sent.

And then came the wait. That unbearable wait where time both froze and raced. His heartbeat became its own metronome, loud and insistent, until,
“Is this... Arthur?”

Just three words. But they were thunder and rain and sunrise and spring all at once. They carried familiarity. Recognition. And somehow, even after all this time, *warmth*.

Arthur stared at the message, heart swelling, chest tightening. He hadn’t expected much, maybe a delayed reply, maybe awkwardness. But instead,

he got a question filled with nostalgia. He knew who he was. Not because he had introduced himself, not because of some long message full of context, but simply from his profile picture.

And just like that, something he thought was lost lit up inside him.

Because in that moment, he wasn't just a name or a ghost from the past.

He was remembered.

He was *recognized*.

As the conversation flowed hesitant at first, like two people wading into water after years away from the shore it grew into something more natural. Messages lengthened. Laughter crept in, tucked between syllables. References to memories. Jokes they both remembered from primary grades. A nickname he hadn't heard in a decade. It was surreal.

He discovered that not only did this friend remember him, they had actually missed him. Genuinely. There was no performance in their tone, no obligation. Just the simple truth: “I always wondered where you went after getting that scholar. We used to talk a lot, no?”

And that did something to him.

It cracked open a part of his heart that he had quietly walled off.

He realized, in a quiet kind of way, that some part of him had always held onto this connection. A fragile thread, buried deep beneath all the changes he had gone through. The silent dormancy of a feeling he didn’t know he still had. And now, it was awake again.

But joy didn’t come alone. It rarely does.

There was a quiet ache underneath it all. A sadness that sat beside the happiness like an old friend of its own. Because the Arthur they remembered; the

wide-eyed, bubbly, open-hearted kid who cracked jokes and wore his emotions proudly, wasn't quite the Arthur he was anymore.

Boarding school life had changed him. Slowly.

Firmly.

What used to be a playground of innocent friendships became a battleground of survival. You couldn't show weakness. You couldn't talk too much. Laugh too loud. Cry too easily. He'd learned the art of hiding emotions and feelings from the outside world. The science of indifference.

He hadn't meant to change. But he had.

So even though he felt genuine happiness during this conversation, he struggled to *show* it. His fingers typed jokes. He threw in some emojis. Laughed through texts. But none of it touched the actual depth of what he was feeling. It was a smile worn like a mask.

What he really wanted to say stayed locked inside his throat: *I missed you too. You were part of my best memories. Back then, when everything was so simple, you mattered to me.*

But he couldn't bring himself to say any of it.

He worried that his silence, his hesitance, might be mistaken for disinterest. That they'd think he had forgotten. But the truth was, he remembered too much. He cared too much. And he'd spent years building walls around those feelings.

As they kept talking, he noticed something else; something that warmed him even more. His friend hadn't really changed. At least not in any bad way that matter. They were still outgoing, still kind, still the same easy-going, confident soul they'd always been.

It comforted him. Reassured him. Made him feel like the past hadn't been completely erased.

They chatted for almost an hour. Messages back and forth, sometimes light-hearted, sometimes tinged with nostalgia.

He asked him about life, how the school was going, what subjects he was doing, whether he still liked things like chess and stuff.

Arthur smiled. They remembered he liked chess.

Even though Arthur had to lose that part of him too he still liked chess or lot. But that's beside the fact that someone still remembered that little detail; that meant something.

He gave updates. Talked about high school. Shared a few carefully worded truths. But behind every sentence, there was one constant feeling he couldn't escape:

I'm not forgotten.

Then, out of curiosity, he asked about the others. "How are the rest of the gang? Do you still talk to them?"

He named a few. Names that felt like family once.
Names he hadn't spoken aloud in years but had
kept close to his heart.

And that's when the friend did something
unexpected.

He sent contact numbers.
Four of them.

Each name beside the number was a memory in
itself; of classroom mischief, of shared lunchboxes,
of games during interval, of group punishments
that turned into laughter.

Arthur's fingers trembled slightly. These were the
people he thought he'd never talk to again. And
now, they were just... there. In his phone. One tap
away.

He didn't wait. Something primal in him took over.
A longing to reclaim that lost world.
He messaged them. All of them.

But hope..... it's a double-edged sword.

The first reply came in within minutes. But it was cold. Polite, yes. Civil. But lifeless. As if the person on the other end was talking to a stranger who just happened to share the same past.

The second response was warmer. But different. The tone had changed. The spark was gone. Their innocence had been replaced by something heavier; more grown-up, more distant.

It stung.

He had expected change, yes. But not this kind of erosion.

He stared at the screen, his heart tight.

What if I had stayed?

Would they be different now? Would I?

He knew the question didn't matter. Life doesn't care for what-ifs. But he asked it anyway.

Because sometimes, regret isn't about making the wrong choice. It's about not getting the chance to see what the other choice could've been.

Still, one contact stood out among the list.

One name.

Diana.

He stared at it. Everything else around him fell away.

Her name wasn't just a name. It was a time capsule.

She was *the* friend. The one who had made him laugh the loudest. The one who had understood him when words weren't enough. The one who had unknowingly taken root in his heart in a way no one else had.

She wasn't just a memory. She was *the* memory.

Seeing her name sent a rush through his chest.
His heart slowed. Then raced. Then stopped
altogether.

Because for years, every move he'd made, the projects he took, the groups he joined, the words he rehearsed were all little steps toward this moment. Toward finding her again.

And now... there she was.

Her name glowing softly on his screen like a door he wasn't sure he was ready to open.

He didn't click.

Didn't type.

Didn't move.

He just... breathed.

Because sometimes, finding what you've been looking for isn't the end of the journey; it's the beginning of something far more terrifying.

She's right there.

After all this time.

He closed his eyes for a moment.

Everything he had built, every version of himself he had crafted, every emotion he had buried; it all came crashing to the surface. The boy who once smiled just because she smiled. The boy who once shared every thought with her like she was a second diary. The boy who had left that town but never really left *her*.

He didn't message her that very moment.

Not because he didn't want to.

But because some moments deserve to exist on their own; untouched. Unsent. Unchanged.

Just the knowledge that she was there. That he could talk to her. That she wasn't lost.

That was enough.

For now.

But for this single moment, Arthur allowed himself something rare; peace.

Because sometimes, just the idea of reunion is enough to light up the night.

Finally Arthur decided to reach out to her. He kept it very simple; subtle.

“Hi”

“Is this Diana?”

Then he waited, as the stars blinked silently above him, hoping that somewhere, in another corner of the world, a girl with a smile that once saved him from himself was about to read those two words and remember.

The seconds that followed felt elastic; stretched thin with anticipation, trembling on the edge of something sacred. Arthur didn’t move. Didn’t breathe too deeply. It was as if the entire universe

had paused with him, watching, waiting, listening
for the digital echo of a reply.

But it didn't come. Not immediately.

Instead, he was left in the quiet. Just him and the wind, and the distant sound of life below muffled conversations, a closing gate, the chirp of a gecko. And still, he watched the screen, half-expecting her name to light up with that small, glowing sign of hope: "typing..."

Nothing.

His chest ached, not with pain, but with something more complicated; a tender kind of sorrow threaded with hope and stitched with fear. He had carried this moment in his mind for years, rehearsed it a hundred different ways. In every version, she replied quickly, happily, with surprise or joy. In every version, she remembered. In every version, something beautiful happened.

But reality was slower, heavier. Real.

Still, he didn't close the app. He couldn't. Even as the wind grew colder and the night crept deeper into silence, he stayed there, the phone resting in his hand like a fragile bridge between then and now. It wasn't about a reply anymore; not just that. It was about everything that message meant. It was about daring to reach out. Daring to feel again.

It was about love; not the romantic kind, though maybe that too. But the kind that roots itself in memory, in the soul, in a place beyond words.

And so, in that quiet rooftop moment, Arthur did something he hadn't done in years.

He hoped.

Not just for her reply.

But for himself.

That somewhere beneath the layers he had built to survive, the boy who once believed in impossible things was still alive.

05. How It All Began

If someone could've seen him from above, seen beyond the surface of his silence, traced the invisible paths of memory he carried within, they would've known that what Arthur felt for this girl wasn't ordinary. It wasn't a passing crush or a fleeting childhood whim. It was something sacred, something resilient. Something that not even the

cold passage of time, nor the long distance between cities and lives, could ever erase.

It was love; Quiet, invisible, and unshaken; the kind that lived in the smallest corners of his heart. And though he didn't understand it back then not when it began, not for many years there was always a part of him that knew. That felt. That waited.

Every feeling has a root. Every storm, every bloom, every ache and joy has a beginning. And Arthur's beginning, the moment his heart unknowingly chose her, wasn't one of grandeur. It wasn't under fireworks or moonlight. It wasn't cinematic or obvious. It was gentle, quiet, like the sound of rain tapping against the rooftop of a Grade 03 classroom.

It happened eleven years ago, on a school morning like any other. Except that morning, the sky was darker than usual. The clouds hung heavy over the coastal town of his hometown, and the breeze

carried the scent of an impending storm. Arthur, as usual, packed his tiny bag with care, kissed his mother goodbye, and left for school. His walk from home to the school gate was already drenched by the time he arrived; it had begun to rain.

But it wasn't just rain. It was one of those early monsoon bursts where the skies seemed angry, spilling over with relentless force. And little Arthur, small for his age and wrapped in his oversized school uniform, ran. Through puddles, through the wind that kept pushing him back. He ran toward the familiar classroom that sat far from the school gate, where he hoped warmth waited.

By the time he got there, he was soaked through. Water dripped from his hair to his collar, from his sleeves to his socks. His fingers trembled from the cold, and his lips were tinged with the faintest blue. He didn't complain. He didn't cry. He simply walked in quietly, took his usual seat next to the girl with

the warmest heart he'd ever known; Diana. And tried to pretend he was fine.

The classroom was already half-filled. Children chatted, joked, shared early-morning snacks. A few of them laughed as they pointed out how wet Arthur was, but he smiled and waved it off, pulling his chair close and trying to hide his shivers. There was a ceiling fan above, one of those noisy ones that rattled while spinning, and it blew directly over their table, its wind cutting through him like a blade.

That's when she noticed.

Without hesitation, Diana turned around to the others and said, with concern that warmed the air more than any heater ever could, "Turn off the fan. Arthur's shivering."

There was a pause. Some of the other kids frowned. One muttered, "But it's not that much

cold in here." Someone else reached for their collar, pretending like it's already sweating.

Arthur, always the peacemaker, always too considerate for his own good, tried to deflect.

"It's okay," he said, forcing a small smile. "I can handle it."

But she didn't let it go.

"Turn it off," she insisted. Not loudly, but with certainty. The kind of certainty only someone who genuinely cared could carry in their voice.

"He's cold."

And so, the fan was turned off.

That was it. That was the moment. The moment that would carve itself into Arthur's soul like initials on a tree bark; subtle, almost unnoticed, but permanent.

He didn't know then what that feeling was. How could he? He was just a boy. But the warmth that bloomed in his chest, even in his soaked uniform, even with his teeth chattering; that warmth wasn't just from the stopped fan. It was from her. From the way she looked at him and saw someone worth caring for.

In the years that followed, Arthur would go through many storms. Life wouldn't stay as innocent as a third-grade classroom. It would get louder, meaner, and darker. He had to leave that school, leave that town, and enter a world behind boarding walls where kindness was currency and trust was rare. There, the laughter of childhood would fade beneath the weight of rules and rivalry, corruption and cruelty.

But through it all, that moment, that one, gentle moment stayed with him.

It became his anchor. His proof that the world wasn't all bad. That someone, once, saw him when he was cold and didn't look away. And it made him believe not just in Diana, but in kindness itself. In goodness. In love.

People might say, "Oh, any good girl would've done that." But that wasn't quite true. Most would care, sure. But to insist, to act even when the person they're helping tries to say it's okay? That takes something else. That takes heart. That takes someone like her.

To Arthur, that moment wasn't small. It was everything. It was the seed of every good thing he later became. The reason he always tried to help others quietly, behind the scenes. The reason he gave more than he took, and smiled even when it hurt. He wanted to pass on what she gave him that day: a reason to believe the world could be kind.

Without that moment, maybe he would've turned out differently. Maybe all the pain he endured later would've twisted him into someone cold. Someone bitter. Someone angry at the world. Maybe someone cruel. (Maybe even like Hitler, he once joked to himself, darkly.) But because of her, he held on.

Because of Diana, he survived the storm.

Years passed. He moved schools. Changed cities. People came and went. But never her. At least not in his heart. While other boys talked about crushes and girlfriends, Arthur stayed silent. He convinced himself that he just wasn't the romantic type, that maybe he'd stay single forever, and that was fine.

But deep down, the truth was simple:

He had already given his heart away.

He didn't want to fall in love again because he already was. Always had been. Even without her

presence, her contact, or her voice, he felt connected to her in a way he couldn't explain. She didn't live in his phone or in his diary. She lived in his spirit, like a quiet melody that never stopped playing.

And as he got older, wiser, and more self-aware, he finally understood what had always been true:

Diana was the reason his heart beat differently.

No matter where life took him, no matter how hard things became, she remained a constant thread through it all. A golden thread that tied him back to who he truly was, the boy with wet hair, shivering in a classroom, who felt love for the first time not through words or flowers; but through purity and goodness.

And even if she never knew the depth of what she meant to him, even if she never understood how one small act changed his whole life, he would still thank her. Every day.

For the warmth. For the love. For showing him that even in a world full of storms, someone, somewhere, might always choose to turn off the fan.

Sometimes, during long nights at the school boarding when everyone else was asleep, Arthur would lie awake, staring at the ceiling. The hum of distant city noise would fade into the background, and he'd find himself thinking about that morning all over again. Not just the scene itself, but every detail around it; the muddy path he ran through, the rhythm of raindrops on his umbrella, the weight of his soaked socks. He would close his eyes and revisit that moment like a place he could return to.

In that memory, Diana's voice echoed clearer than ever: "He's cold."

There was something so powerful in how simple it was. In a world that often demands grand gestures

for love to be proven, her gesture was small but true. And that truth was enough to shape a soul.

Later in life, when Arthur met people who were kind, who paused to ask if he was okay, or who lent him a pen without expecting it back, he saw flashes of her. Sometimes, it would be in a smile. Sometimes, in a gesture. And other times, he'd catch himself holding back from helping someone until he remembered what it felt like to be helped.

He would remember, and then he would act.

Because love, he realized, didn't have to look like roses or confessions. It could look like a fan being turned off. Like a voice speaking up when everyone else stayed silent. Like someone choosing, in a moment, to care.

He didn't know where Diana was now. He didn't know what her life looked like, what dreams she chased, or whether she remembered that rainy morning at all. Maybe to her, it was just a blip in a

sea of school days. Maybe she didn't even know she changed someone's life.

But Arthur knew.

And if the universe allowed it; if fate was ever kind enough to bring her back into his orbit; he wouldn't confess with poetry or flowers. He'd sit quietly beside her, maybe in a park or a library, and simply say:

"Thank you."

For everything she gave him without even trying.

And in that moment, she might smile, confused or curious, or maybe even remember.

But even if she didn't, it wouldn't matter.

Because what she gave him, compassion, warmth, a reason to believe was more than enough to carry a heart through a storm.

06. The First Message.

There are moments in life that don't just arrive, they land like whispers from fate, long-awaited echoes of a hope you never truly let go of. Moments not defined by grandeur, but by a trembling in your chest, like a stillness in the air, as though the world around you pauses just long enough for your heart to catch up. These are the surreal moments not because they defy logic, but because they mirror the dreams you've sheltered in silence for years. You imagine them endlessly, dress them in anticipation, give them voices and colors and yet, when they come, they strip you bare with how real they feel.

For Arthur, one such moment unfolded on the evening of December 5th.

He was sitting on the edge of his narrow bed in a dimly lit boarding room, a book lying open beside him; its pages still but irrelevant. The overhead bulb hummed gently, casting a dull yellow haze that softened the rough edges of the room. But

Arthur wasn't looking at the book. Nor did he notice the hum, or the fact that his tea had gone cold beside him. His eyes were locked on his phone screen. His thumb hovered just above the digital keyboard, trembling slightly; not from fear, but from the sheer weight of what this moment could become.

He had Diana's contact.

Just seeing her name on the screen had sent a wave of disbelief through him. Nine years had passed since their last real conversation. Nine years of memories, of wondering what became of her, of carrying moments like fragile glass in his pocket. And now, suddenly, a doorway had appeared; one he could walk through with just few words.

What do you even say after nearly a decade?

He had rehearsed this moment in his mind so many times. Should he mention the project he was organizing? Should he anchor the chat in the

present and ease into the past? Should he dive headfirst into nostalgia, mention her laugh, the way she used to laugh with him for his funny handwriting, the silly jokes they shared under the old school classroom?

So many choices, each one tugging at a different version of himself.

He chose something simple instead. Something safe.

“Hi”

“It’s Diana, right?”

Just five plain words.

He stared at the message for a long time. Read it over and over, as if searching for hidden layers he

might have missed. Then, slowly, with a breath he hadn't realized he was holding, he tapped 'send.'

And waited.

She didn't reply immediately.

Of course she didn't. Diana had never been the type to live glued to a screen. Even back in primary school, while others obsessed over gadgets and games, she had preferred being in the moment; talking to people, finishing her work with a stubborn diligence, helping anyone who asked without hesitation. Her focus had always been anchored in the real world. Arthur had admired that about her, even envied it.

Now, years later, it seemed she hadn't changed much. Her social media was still practically a ghost town barely any photos, hardly any posts. If she had created those accounts, it was probably more out of necessity than desire.

That night, Arthur couldn't sleep. He checked his phone every few minutes, hoping to see the screen light up, hoping for those three dots to appear, indicating she was typing. Nothing. Just the quiet of his room, the distant sounds of traffic beyond the walls, and the ever-growing spiral of doubt inside him.

Maybe she wouldn't reply.

Maybe she didn't remember him.

Maybe he had been foolish to even try.

The thoughts came in waves, each one laced with a deeper anxiety. He turned them over in his mind, trying to fight the spiral, but it was like walking through fog; everything felt unsure, blurry. Eventually, sleep claimed him in restless fits.

Then, the next day, around noon, it happened.

His phone buzzed softly.

"Hii"

"Yeah."

Two words. Just that.

But they pulled the breath from his lungs.

He was walking back from class, his bag slung over one shoulder, weaving through the busy midday streets. But in that moment, the crowd disappeared. The noise dissolved. All that existed was the screen in his palm, glowing with her response. He read it once. Twice. A dozen times. Then, without giving himself time to second-guess it, he replied:

"It's Arthur. Ring any bells?"

Then came the silence again. Long, excruciating. The doubt returned like an old friend.

Until 6 PM.

“Arthur?? Of course I remember you!”

“It’s been forever! I can’t believe it’s really you!”

His heart leapt.

He could feel the corners of his mouth pulling into a grin that refused to be contained. It wasn't just relief; it was joy. Pure, unfiltered joy. The kind that bubbles up from somewhere deep and forgotten. He sat down on the edge of his bed, dropped his bag with a soft thud, and let the moment wrap around him.

She remembered him. Not vaguely. Not politely.

She was thrilled.

That night, they chatted for hours. He didn't even notice how quickly time passed, how the city outside transitioned from golden hour to moonlit silence. For the first time in years, he felt like he was laughing without effort. Like the version of himself that used to exist, the boy who once

giggled with her over silly cartoons and classroom pranks had returned for a while.

And it felt so good to be him again.

From that day on, their conversations became a thread that wove quietly through his life. Not constant, but consistent. They didn't text all the time, but when they did, the rest of the world fell into the background.

They talked about everything; little things, mostly. How her day had gone. Whether she still liked that old cartoon they had bonded over back in primary grades. (She did. She even remembered the theme song.) Whether he still got scolded for zoning out in class. (He did. Less often, but still.) Her replies were sweet, warm, often sprinkled with emojis and exclamations. She hadn't lost that spark.

What struck Arthur the most wasn't just the content of their chats, but how she made him feel.

Seen.

Valued.

He noticed the way she thanked him; softly, sincerely. Like when he sent her a reminder about a submission she almost forgot. Or when he shared a note she hadn't even asked for yet. Each time, her gratitude felt like a small sunbeam breaking through clouds.

And he kept everything.

Every message. Every word that made him feel important.

He couldn't bear to lose a single syllable.

Their chats began to mean everything to him; not because they were romantic, at least not yet, but because they were sacred. Sacred in their simplicity. Sacred because she was there, talking to him, choosing him.

Still, Arthur never told her what he truly felt. He didn't know how to. Or maybe he did, but feared what might happen if he did.

So he dropped hints instead; small ones. An extra compliment here. A reply that lingered a little longer. A message sent at midnight, just to say, "This song reminded me of you." But he never pushed. Never crossed the invisible line that separated 'just friends' from everything else.

Because losing her wasn't an option.

Not again.

So he settled. Willingly. Into the rhythm of what they had. Friendship, rekindled. Honest, comforting, full of shared memories and subtle glances into the past.

But the insecurity never truly left him.

He never messaged her without a reason. He needed an excuse; a question about the project, a doubt about a lesson, a casual check-in. He didn't want to be a burden. Didn't want to seem too eager.

Still, every time he did message her, she replied. Kindly. Fully. Never dry, never distant.

And he knew, he *knew* that she cared. Even if she didn't say it out loud.

When Arthur told her about the project, the one they were organizing for school her response was instant and enthusiastic. She asked questions. Sent suggestions. Offered contacts. Shared ideas, even followed up on tasks despite her own busy schedule. It meant more than he could explain.

Maybe she believed in the project.

Maybe she just wanted to support him.

Maybe... maybe she wanted to see him again too.

Whatever the reason, it became something they shared. A thread of purpose that gave them a reason to talk. To collaborate. To build something together.

And for Arthur, it was more than just a project.

It was a bridge.

Back to her. Back to who he used to be when she was in his life. Back to the boy who had smiled more freely, laughed more often, and dreamed more boldly.

He told himself to take it slow. That some stories needed time. That what mattered wasn't rushing, but nurturing what was real. And he truly believed it.

But every night, without fail, before falling asleep, he would scroll through their chats. Not for

reassurance, exactly. But for the feeling they gave him. The warmth. The belonging.

Her words were like tiny lanterns in the dark. And in a world that often felt too cold, too fast, too lonely those lanterns lit his way.

With every message, Arthur wasn't just continuing a conversation.

He was continuing something much deeper.

A memory.

A feeling.

A story.

Their story.

And he didn't know where it was going. He didn't need to.

Because for the first time in years, it was going somewhere.

And that was enough.

07. Shadows behind the Spotlight

Every well-meant endeavor faces resistance, not always from external forces, but sometimes from within the very house it was born in. For Arthur, the realization came like a slow-burning fire. While the buzz of the new project had started to light up the Mathematics Circle with energy and anticipation, there was one corner of the room that remained chillingly cold: the seat of the Head of the Society, known hereafter as HOS.

From the very beginning, Arthur sensed a quiet opposition. It wasn't loud or confrontational at first. It was passive, almost polite, but unmistakably disapproving. Despite the collective excitement and the supportive nods from nearly every other member, HOS stood distant, arms folded, watching rather than participating. It puzzled Arthur. He had crafted the project with purpose, aligning it with

the society's goals and the school's values. So why the resistance?

It wasn't until the second committee meeting that the passive disapproval morphed into subtle sabotage. HOS began questioning logistics that had already been settled, sowing seeds of doubt about the feasibility of the project. At first, Arthur countered each concern with facts and clarity, maintaining his usual composed demeanor. But as the weeks passed, the efforts to derail the project grew more direct. Room bookings were mysteriously canceled. Meetings were rescheduled without notice. Rumors began to circulate; quiet whispers of the project being "too ambitious," "ill-planned," or "unauthorized."

Arthur found himself constantly on defense. Yet, even as he extinguished fire after fire, he never lost his temper, nor did he make the conflict public. He understood the fragile politics within the society. HOS, by title, held authority. But Arthur had

something more powerful: trust. The members believed in him, respected his vision, and most of all, wanted to be part of something meaningful.

Still, experience had taught Arthur that belief alone wasn't always enough. A leader had to anticipate the worst, prepare for it quietly, and act only when absolutely necessary. That's when the idea of a backup plan began to take root in his mind; not out of paranoia, but out of calculated precaution.

He didn't want to be reactive. He wanted to be ready.

The first step was understanding the exact nature of the threat. HOS hadn't yet outright canceled the project, but the day-to-day operations were growing increasingly difficult. One week, Arthur's carefully prepared proposal documents went missing. The next, the Google Drive folder was deleted and restored only after an exhausting

number of calls and emails. These weren't accidents.

He knew he couldn't confront HOS directly. That would jeopardize the project for good. So instead, he quietly started working on his safety net; a Plan B that would ensure the project continued even if it was unofficial, underground, and completely off the record.

Since he was the acting coordinator, he still had the power to decide team roles. That became his strength. Arthur began identifying people; those who were not just capable, but loyal. People he had helped in the past. Friends who respected him, mentees who looked up to him, classmates who owed him favors, and members who believed in him more than in rules. He didn't frame it as manipulation. For him, it was strategy born out of necessity.

He began casually asking questions, testing loyalty in small, indirect ways. He noticed who came early to meetings, who stayed after to help, who volunteered for tasks that were tedious but essential. He remembered the ones who responded quickly to his messages, who thanked him unprompted, who showed signs of genuine investment. It wasn't long before he had a mental list.

When he began assembling the team, he was careful. Every conversation was quiet. Every decision calculated. He chose people who could be discreet those who understood the stakes, who wouldn't panic under pressure, and who, if push came to shove, would protect the project even at the risk of being reprimanded.

Trust, secrecy, and commitment. Those were his filters.

One by one, he approached them. At the end of meetings, in corridors after school, during evening calls under the guise of casual check-ins. Each time, his words were deliberate.

“There’s something I’m preparing for, just in case. I need to know if I can count on you.”

No one asked too many questions. Some smiled knowingly. Others just nodded. A few, touched by his quiet sincerity, gave their word on the spot.

What surprised Arthur was how willing they were. Maybe it was because they, too, had noticed the strange tension. Maybe they admired his resolve. Or maybe they just believed in the cause.

Whatever the reason, he was grateful. By the end of the month, he had a parallel structure in place. A ghost team that mirrored the official one; same roles, same responsibilities, only with tighter cohesion and no involvement from HOS.

They rehearsed tasks as part of the main group but coordinated backups privately. Documents were stored on alternate drives. Communication channels were duplicated and encrypted. Even the venue had a backup plan. If HOS pulled the plug, Arthur would simply shift everything into the shadows and run the show regardless. Risky, but necessary.

Amidst all of this, something unexpected began to blossom; something personal and far more emotionally consuming.

His chats with Diana.

What had started as sporadic, nostalgic exchanges were now daily conversations. They were still mostly about the project at first; questions, ideas, suggestions. But over time, the tone shifted. There was warmth. Comfort. Vulnerability.

They began talking late into the night. Sometimes about school, sometimes about the pressure of

expectations, sometimes about the past. The jokes became inside ones. The goodnights became longer. Occasionally, one of them would send a message and then quickly follow it up with, “I don’t know why I told you that.” And yet, they did.

One night, after an unusually heavy day filled with tensions at the society, Arthur shared something he never had before.

“Sometimes I feel like I’m carrying everything alone. And if I fall, no one will notice. They’ll just... keep walking.”

The reply didn’t come immediately. For a minute, he thought he’d gone too far.

Then:

“You’re not alone. I see you. Always.”

He stared at the message for a long time. Read it again the next morning.

There was no confession. No declarations. But something unspoken had settled between them a bond growing quietly in the spaces between texts.

But what neither of them knew was that this deepening connection, this comfort and closeness, would soon lead to a storm no one could have predicted.

One afternoon, while reviewing the digital attendance sheet of the society's meeting, HOS noticed something odd; an unusual frequency of messages between Arthur and another group of students, including shared documents and notes not part of the official channels. It wasn't the content that raised concern it was the pattern.

Jealousy? Perhaps. Authority being questioned? Definitely.

Within a week, HOS began quietly inquiring about the backup team, about odd activities, and sideline meetings. Whispers reached Arthur. He tightened

his circle, doubled down on caution. But the sense of looming danger grew heavier with each passing day.

And still, every night, he messaged Diana. Not because he wanted to escape, but because she had become his anchor. The one person who reminded him that all of this the fights, the risks, the exhaustion was worth it.

Because some stories demand to be completed.

Even if they must be told in whispers.

08. Silent Threads

Arthur had always been a rational thinker. A planner. Someone who observed, analyzed, and then acted; not ruled by emotion, but always aware of it. But no amount of rationality could have prepared him for the quiet panic that crept into his chest one evening, when he noticed something had changed.

It was a regular weekday. Arthur had just wrapped up his study schedule, the room dimly lit by his desk lamp and filled with the usual silence of his boarding space. As he mindlessly scrolled through the platform where he and Diana usually chatted, a void stared back at him; the once-familiar profile picture on her account was gone. Not changed. Not updated. Just... gone. A blank silhouette in place of the face he had come to associate with quiet warmth and late-night smiles.

His heart skipped. He blinked twice, refreshed the page. Nothing. A hollow doubt set in. Had she blocked him?

He waited.

Maybe she just deleted the photo. Maybe she was updating it. Maybe she had a technical issue. He cycled through excuses, each less convincing than the last. But the timing felt off. Too sudden. Too out of character.

The thing that tormented him most was the silence that followed. He had no reason, no context to message her and confirm what had happened. It would seem desperate. Obsessive, even. And Arthur had always been careful never to cross that line.

But over the next few days, he found himself checking in more and more. Refreshing. Reopening the app. Each time hoping the profile picture had

returned or that her account was active again. But nothing changed.

Eventually, he gave in. He typed a short, harmless message; something neutral enough not to raise suspicion, but sufficient to test whether she'd actually blocked him. He hit send.

But the message didn't go through.

His heart sank. No check mark. No "delivered." No reply.

That's when the internal war began. Logic versus emotion. On one hand, everything pointed to a block. On the other hand, this wasn't like her. Diana had always been kind; even in silence. She would never just cut him off without explanation.

So he held on to hope. A thin, trembling thread of it.

Days stretched into weeks. The thread began to fray. Arthur wrestled with the idea that maybe he had misread everything; their connection, the conversations, the comfort they had found in each other. Was it just a one-sided illusion?

Then, one day, when he absentmindedly tapped into her profile again, a line of text appeared beneath her name.

“This person is no longer available on this platform.”

Arthur stared at it, frozen.

A rush of relief washed over him. It wasn’t a block. She hadn’t pushed him away.

Her account had been deleted.

It didn’t answer every question, but it restored some peace. The knot in his chest loosened, if only

a little. At least she hadn't chosen to cut him off. At least that decision hadn't been personal.

But relief was quickly followed by emptiness. She was gone and he had no way of reaching her.

Diana wasn't one to use every social media app out there. And neither was he. But desperation had a way of changing things. For the first time, Arthur stepped into unfamiliar digital spaces, creating accounts on every platform he could think of. Facebook. Instagram. Viber. Snapchat. Even platforms he couldn't stand.

But she wasn't on any of them.

He wondered if she'd vanished on purpose. Maybe her parents had something to do with it. Maybe it was school pressure. Maybe—

Maybe she was gone for good.

Meanwhile, in a world away, Diana sat in a quiet room of her own. Her phone had been confiscated nearly two weeks ago. It wasn't the first time something like this had happened. Her parents had always been strict about phone use, especially during exam seasons.

She remembered what happened back in Grade 10; how she had once slipped in her grades, just a little, because of her growing interest in devices. Her parents hadn't taken it lightly. Phones were taken away. Rules reinforced. And Diana, being the responsible one, had accepted it without protest.

This time was different, though.

Her marks were fine. Stable. Unchanged. But her parents had noticed the extra time she was spending on her phone lately; especially at late nights. They didn't know it was Arthur. They didn't know those late-night texts were about memories and books and unspoken feelings.

All they saw was potential distraction.

And so, one day, without warning, they had taken her phone and deleted the app completely.

Diana was sad about it. Not because of the phone, but because of the silence that would follow. She had wanted to explain. To leave a message. But she never got the chance. And when she finally got a new device weeks later, everything had changed.

She created an account on another platform, quietly, hoping maybe—just maybe—Arthur might do the same.

And he did.

He found her new account nearly two weeks later. A flicker of familiar initials and a profile that matched her subtle style. Arthur's fingers hovered over the screen. He didn't message her right away. What if she didn't want to be found? What if his previous messages had triggered the deletion?

He waited.

Three more days passed. Then, finally, he sent a message.

Just one.

A simple, gentle "Hey."

It was all he could muster.

Within minutes, she replied.

"Hi Arthur :)"

That smiley face felt like sunlight through rain.

They didn't talk much; not like before. The messages came twice or thrice a week, sometimes less. But they were enough.

Each one was carefully crafted. Each one treasured. Like letters exchanged during war time; short, encrypted, and brimming with unspoken emotions.

Arthur respected the space she needed. He kept his messages brief, warm, and low-key. He didn't ask why she disappeared. He didn't press her for long conversations. He simply existed in that quiet corner of her world available, supportive, and present.

Diana, on the other hand, found comfort in the restraint. It was like slipping into a blanket of understanding. She didn't have to explain everything; he just knew. And that made all the difference.

And so, their conversations continued; scattered across weeks, stitched with subtlety, carried by care. They had found another way to communicate. One that didn't need words every day. One that lived in pauses, in timing, in presence.

It wasn't loud. It wasn't constant.

But it was real.

And for both of them; for Arthur and Diana that was more than enough.

09.Against The Tide

Time had become a blur. Days slipped through Arthur's fingers like grains of sand, elusive and weightless. The calendar on his wall still showed the date of the last week's team meeting, but he hadn't flipped the page in days. Maybe weeks. He couldn't remember anymore. He wasn't even sure what day it was, only that the event was near. Four days? No, maybe five. Numbers had lost meaning except for the ones in his spreadsheets, the ones tied to deadlines, budgets, and room allocations. Every second now felt sacred. Every second felt stolen.

He was no longer working on a school project. That illusion had long passed. This, this was a crusade. A legacy. His shot at proving that he could create something meaningful, not just for the society or the school, but for himself. And if he was being honest; for her too.

The boardroom meetings, the proposal drafts, the sleepless nights spent arguing over stage placements and guest seating all of it was personal. Because through the cracks of the effort, one name always floated in the background, like a gentle echo: *Diana*.

That day had been the longest yet.

From the moment the sky began to lighten behind the school walls, Arthur and the president of the society were already on their feet, chasing time like it was a runaway train. The president a quiet, assertive soul who had become a good friend to

him barely spoke more than necessary. Yet in their silence, they communicated fluently.

They dashed from one end of the school to the other, clipboards in hand, voices hoarse from repeating the same set of instructions to volunteers who were beginning to crack under pressure. The computer lab's projector was still faulty. The costume vendor had canceled at the last minute. The guest list needed reshuffling after a sudden withdrawal.

They had become problem-solvers, negotiators, diplomats, and at times, therapists. At one point, they sat in a dusty stairwell calming down a junior who had burst into tears over a misplaced mic cable. They patched him up, handed her a new assignment, and sent him back out like nothing had happened.

The school's walls usually cold, indifferent slabs of plaster felt alive now, echoing their footsteps,

breathing with anticipation. But anticipation carried a cost.

By the time the sun dipped below the horizon, Arthur's shirt was soaked, clinging to his skin like a second layer of tension. His shoulders ached. His legs burned. He had skipped lunch. Again. He had skipped his evening tea. Again. He had ignored the gnawing emptiness in his stomach so many times that it had stopped protesting.

Yet none of that slowed him down.

He made one last round of the venue before slipping out quietly. The corridors were finally quiet. Too quiet. The kind of quiet that made his thoughts unbearably loud. He walked with his head down, dragging his feet back to the boarding house.

He didn't even remember unlocking the door to his room. He just knew that somehow, he ended up inside.

The moment the door shut behind him, the silence felt suffocating.

He dropped his bag with a thud. Sank into the chair. Leaned back. Exhaled.

The room smelled faintly of old books and fatigue. His small desk was cluttered with half-used notepads, scribbled checklists, empty wrappers. The window was slightly open, letting in the hum of distant traffic and the occasional chirp of a lone cricket. The world outside seemed far too calm.

He allowed himself a moment.

Just a moment.

And then,

Buzz.

He opened one eye and stared at the glowing screen on his bed. A single message. A harmless-looking notification.

He considered ignoring it. But habit was stronger than hesitation.

He reached for the phone.

Tapped.

Read.

Froze.

“Bro... HOS pulled the plug. I heard he spoke with the coordinator. Something’s off. She might’ve shut this down.”

At first, it didn’t register. His brain, wired for logistics and problem-solving, tried to decode it like a riddle. But there was no hidden meaning.

His breath caught.

He read it again.

Then again.

It hit like a blow to the chest.

The Head of Section had pulled the plug. The coordinator who had been distant but cooperative was now silent. Unreachable. There were whispers. Undercurrents. Something was happening behind closed doors, in staff rooms and admin meetings he wasn't invited to.

Someone had sabotaged everything.

And not just *someone. Her.*

The HOS.

Arthur's heart thudded.

He stood up abruptly, the chair screeching against the floor. He began to pace. Back and forth. Hands clenched into fists. Blood roaring in his ears. The betrayal stung sharp and personal.

They had followed protocol. Jumped through every bureaucratic hoop. Met every demand. Revised

every detail. And still, the woman who had never once offered encouragement had decided to intervene now, when it was too late to start again but just early enough to tear it all apart.

The fury came first. Then the grief.

He wanted to scream. To punch the wall. To crumple every printout and burn every file. But instead, he dropped into his chair again and stared at his desk drawer.

Slowly, he opened it.

Inside, beneath a tangle of old charger cords and a dried-out highlighter, was a black notebook.
Unmarked. Anonymous.

He had started writing it weeks ago. Not out of paranoia, but out of instinct. A part of him had always known.

He flipped it open.

Page after page of messy handwriting. Sketches. Flowcharts. Contact lists. Secret venue bookings. Emergency plans. Alternative identities for the same project. Different club names. Different logos. Even dummy events that could be used as cover.

It was all there.

He reached for his phone again.

Opened a chat group named "The Watchtower" a title only a few in the society knew existed. These were the ones he trusted. The ones who understood the stakes.

He typed:

"Plan B is active. No more delays. We're going ahead; covertly."

Sent.

For a few seconds, there was only silence.

Then:

"Affirmative."

"On, it."

"Ready when you are."

"Let's burn this into history."

His chest tightened; but this time, with something different.

Hope.

A quiet fire.

The days that followed were a master-class in subterfuge.

The original project was shelved; officially. They stopped posting about it. Stopped mentioning it by name. Arthur even issued a fake notice about a scheduling conflict, something about "academic

prioritization." Most believed it. Some were disappointed. None suspected the truth.

Meanwhile, the *real* operation slipped into gear.

They held late-night meetings under other clubs' names. They swapped out formal planning docs for innocent-looking notes. The president of the society became the public face of disappointment, acting like the event had died a natural death. Arthur played his part too quiet, composed, distracted.

But behind the scenes, they were rehearsing more than ever.

They ran full mock sessions in abandoned classrooms. Built stage props in a former storage closet. Stored sound equipment in unused lockers. Every part of the project had been split and hidden across the campus like a puzzle.

The stakes were higher than ever.

One wrong move and the HOS would sniff them out. And there'd be no recovering from that.

But Arthur wasn't scared anymore.

He was sharpened.

Fury had passed through him like fire through metal and he had come out forged.

He worked in bursts that lasted till the first birds began to sing. Survived on instant coffee and cereal bars. His eyes burned. His hands trembled. But the vision in his mind burned brighter than anything else.

And taped above his desk, where he could see it every night, was a single photograph.

A younger version of himself. Hair messier. Face softer.

Beside him stood a girl laughing at something outside the frame;

Diana.

The memory had grown blurry over the years. But the *feeling* remained crystal clear.

He didn't know what would happen when she saw him again. Didn't know if she'd smile, or pretend not to see. But this, this was the only way he could think of to make his mark. To become someone who could stand before her with pride. Not as the lost boy but as the young man he had become.

He whispered to the photo every night, like a ritual.

"Almost there."

The night before the event arrived like the hush before a storm.

He barely slept.

There was too much to do. Too many checks. Too many people to reassure.

He stood outside the venue at dawn, cold air nipping at his skin, watching the sun rise behind the auditorium like a curtain lifting before a play.

Everything was ready.

And in that moment, as the first volunteers trickled in, bleary-eyed but determined, Arthur realized something.

He wasn't just leading a team anymore.

He was leading a rebellion.

Not against the school. Not against the HOS.

But against the invisible forces that had always told him he wasn't enough.

Against doubt. Against fear. Against history.

He took one last breath.

Straightened his back.

And stepped into the light.

10. End of the beginning

It was the morning of the event.

Not just any event, not just a gathering of students or a celebration of academic pursuits; this one carried weight, wrapped tightly in layers of meaning, memory, and unspoken hopes. It had survived sabotage, been born of defiance, and stood now as a monument to endurance. To Arthur, it was more than a final product; it was a passage; a narrow bridge built carefully between who he had become and who he once was.

The air was crisp, but warmer than expected. Not because of the sun, although it did rise with a kind of theatrical glow that morning but because something deeper stirred within him. There were nerves, yes, but they weren't the kind that accompanied stage fright or fear of failure. This

was different. This was anticipation, the kind that tightens the lungs and pulls the heartbeat into a quiet sprint.

Everything was done. Every task checked, every plan completed. The stage had been dismantled back at his school, the final applause echoing into memory. Now, Arthur stood at the gates of a different place. A place that used to be his;

Her school;

His old school;

Their school;

He hadn't walked these corridors in years. The air here smelled of a different time, like ink on exercise books, chalk dust, wet shoes after a rain. He passed a corridor and saw his reflection in the glass; taller, older, but somehow still holding the same eyes. Memories clung to the corners of the classrooms, tucked into laughter from boys playing

under the mango tree, and hidden in the way sunlight filtered through the high windows.

She might be somewhere here.

His footsteps were quiet, deliberate. A few students turned their heads as he passed, unfamiliar yet oddly familiar. Some teachers recognized him. A polite nod. A handshake. But his mind was elsewhere.

He walked past the science lab, past the library doors that had swallowed hours of his childhood. Past the courtyard where he had once seen her; Diana; reading alone under the tree. Back then, she had worn her hair in a braid, always carried two pens, and tucked flowers between the pages of her textbooks. He remembered all of it.

He wasn't sure how he would see her again.

The occasion was a collaborative segment of the academic festival; an inter-school crossover that

had been the one chance, the one excuse, to step foot into her world. They had sent him as a representative, but he knew it wasn't duty that brought him here. It was unfinished history.

Students moved around in coordinated chaos, arranging stalls, preparing displays. Arthur stood quietly by the main hall entrance. His role was over. His name had been announced. Applause had rung. He had smiled, shook hands, bowed slightly, and fulfilled every obligation asked of him.

But he didn't leave.

He wandered, eyes scanning faces, catching moments. The school looked so alive. Familiar, yet changed. The classrooms now held new voices. The gardens had grown wild. A new generation had taken over, but the essence remained.

His heart pounded louder with every corner turned. Would she even be here? Would she recognize him? Would she care?

And then...

There was a corridor.

He walked down it slowly, the sound of his shoes muffled by the hum of conversation and footsteps. The hallway was long, open to the sun on one side, lined with windows on the other. At the end, near the notice board that always displayed the monthly birthdays, someone stood.

A girl.

She wasn't looking at him. Her head was tilted, reading something. Her hair fell softly over her shoulder. No braid. Just loose, flowing, like the breeze had written a poem through it. She wore the school's prefect badge, clipped neatly to her sash.

Time stopped.

Arthur's breath caught in his throat. His legs froze. Everything the noise, the movement, the festival faded into a muffled blur. All that remained in sharp focus was her.

Diana.

He hadn't prepared for this moment. He had envisioned it, yes. Countless times. Dreamt of it during nights when sleep felt too heavy. Rehearsed lines, imagined expressions. But nothing, not even the most hopeful version in his head, had matched the reality.

She turned slowly.

And their eyes met.

It wasn't loud. There were no fireworks. No dramatic music. Just stillness. A quiet gasp that never escaped their lips. A glance that held a decade's worth of memory. Her eyes widened, but she didn't move. Neither did he. The distance

between them wasn't more than a few steps, but it felt like a tightrope between two lifetimes.

In that silence, the world spoke.

It whispered every laugh they had once shared. Every unsaid word. Every silent cry and forgotten joy. It spoke of afternoons under the tree, of projects done together, of last goodbyes that were never said aloud.

The hallway shimmered with the weight of it all. The sun painted golden patterns on the floor between them, like a bridge drawn from light itself.

In their eyes, there was recognition.

The kind that only exists when two people once knew each other so deeply, that even time could not erase the imprint.

The crowd moved around them, students laughing, teachers calling names, an announcement crackling through the speakers; but none of it mattered.

There, in that hallway of their past, Arthur and Diana simply saw each other.

And it was enough.

Everything Arthur went through to be there, every move, every plan suddenly felt less. Everything around them suddenly made sense at the same time didn't make any sense at all.

The story didn't need words.

Arthur had finally achieved what he set out to do, and in that moment, everything he had worked for came together.

Author's Note:

*There are stories you write to be read, and then
there are stories you write because they ask to be
remembered. This is one of the latter.*

I never planned to write a book. I only planned to carry a memory. But memories, like stories, have a way of asking to be told.

They echo louder the longer you stay silent.
So this became a quiet rebellion against forgetting,
against time, against all the things I wished I had said but never did.

This story isn't perfect. Neither are the people in it.
But it's honest. It's woven from the kind of truths that don't surface in conversations; the kind that sit quietly at the back of your thoughts.

It's about two people, Arthur K. A. Malowen and Diana S. Mayastashki, whose connection lived in subtleties and silence, in loyalty and longing.

To you, the reader, whoever you are I want you to know: this story isn't here to shout, but to whisper. It's not about grand love stories with dramatic endings.

It's about the ones that never quite ended at all.

There was a page that was never part of the book. But always was a part of the story; The one that got torn, quietly, at the end.

And if, by some turn of the universe, the right person reads this:
if you recognize what lies beneath the names and metaphors, if you know who you are...
just know that this book is a puzzle.

It begins with the names, and the author's name is

a breadcrumb just for you.

When you solve it, you'll know the torn page.

That page may not exist in this book.

But it existed; deeply.

Thank you for turning these pages anyway.

Thank you for believing that some silences deserve
to be listened to.

— *Murk Lundi 38BBY*